

THE GALLERY

An Illustrated Tour of the Bible

VOLUME 1



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INTRODUCTION

The Gallery was designed for God's people—Christian families, in particular. It assumes users will know a few of the basics: that the Bible leads me to Jesus; that God loves me and, for Jesus' sake, forgives all my sins; that he has a plan for my life. It supposes readers trust that the Bible is God's true Word, that he inspired its writing, and that he will never lie to us or fail to keep his promises (*Hebrews 6:17-19*). But we cannot automatically assume that all Christians are avid Bible readers. Scripture can be intimidating. Long names, thick translations, ancient customs, and endless genealogies can be daunting. *The Gallery* addresses that concern by concentrating on Bible imagery, word-pictures, analogies, metaphors, signs, symbols, and parables. It references bits and pieces of ordinary life. The overarching objective is to focus on Bible truths that strengthen and instruct Bible lovers who are not enthusiastic Bible readers. Our prayer is that, in the process, God's people will mature spiritually as members of God's dear family (*Hebrews 5:11-14*).

Many people (including this author) are visual learners. God understands our liability. He has filled his book with verbal illustrations for people like us. Some of these figures run the gamut of Scripture: *light, trees, blood, rivers, temples, altars, harvests, stars, bread, water, doors, gardens, deserts, valleys, mountains, sheep, slaves, cities, banquets, kingdoms, families*. They work in tandem, bringing God's story into vivid focus. They are the connecting tissue of God's Word—breadcrumbs leading us to divine truth. They turn our hearts to God's love, where his unvarnished revelations target human hearts from the 30,000-foot level. From these images, we gather information about our Lord's character, his will, and his work. Moreover, we discover ourselves in God's family album. After a few of the gallery tours, you will see that *the gallery* of this work's title is a visual depiction of God's eternal kingdom. As such, it is a sacred trust to cherish, test, appropriate, apply, share, and defend. In these verbal images there is life (*Deuteronomy 32:46-47*).

Jesus frequently used figures of speech to give his followers a deeper understanding of his message. The pictures he used came from the realities of a life lived in his spiritual kingdom on earth. When The Teacher said things like, *You are the **light** of the world; I am the **vine**, you are*

the branches; or, *The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls*, they resonated. Even if the people who heard them had never visited a real kingdom, held a real pearl, or grafted a real olive branch onto an olive tree, they had a working knowledge of what these terms represented. With that scant knowledge as background, the struggle to understand God and his kingdom was within reach. The rest would be played out in an organic wrestling match with God, as people begin to grasp how these symbols applied to their relationship with him. These were good fights. Edifying. Sometimes painful. Intimate. Liberating. Ultimately, they always resulted in a blessing (*Genesis 32:24-30*).

The writer of Hebrews encouraged us to *fix our eyes on Jesus* and his teachings (*Hebrews 12:2*). Today many families struggle to maintain their spiritual focus. It's hard to care for a family, start a career, run a business, go to school, have an active social life, and still keep one's eyes fixed on Jesus. We are easily distracted by a world searching for life's meaning and purpose. The Apostle Paul wrote, "The time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather teachers around them to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears from the truth and turn aside to myths" (*2 Timothy 4:3-4*).

You and I live in a culture that doesn't have time for God. Many folks don't know how to make room for him in their lives or in their hearts. Some have grown up believing that God's truth is little more than a collection of pontificated dogma, radical opinions, and far-fetched theories. They have dismissed the possibility that his Word is a far higher truth than any human truth could ever be.

Our eyes are fixed on Jesus when we study and practice his Word. Non-studiers and non-practicing Christians tend to stunt their own spiritual growth. A shallow faith makes people vulnerable to the influence traps of our day. The trap that takes the most prisoners is the lie that one's spiritual life doesn't matter. Some have speculated that such an attitude is the result of over-selling corporate worship to the detriment of our private practice of the faith. No matter where it happens or what the circumstances may be, seeking God's presence is profoundly important (*Matthew 6:33*).

That longing for his ongoing presence is the driving force behind these family conversations. Faith life often begins in the home. At least that was God's original plan (*Deuteronomy 6:1-9*). Fixing our eyes on Jesus means fixing his living Word in the everyday lives of family members, young

and old. It includes group prayer and regular worship with other members of the faith, daily Bible reading at home with anyone who shows up, and ongoing spiritual conversations at the most intimate levels of family discourse. In love, we encourage each other to remain faithful to God's Word—to hear it, read it, meditate on it, and share it with others.

May your visits to *The Gallery* open new vistas of Bible understanding for you and the other members of your family. May your wrestling matches with the Stranger, who lovingly stalks your camp with a holy desire to bless your family and embrace you with his love. And may your joyful response to the Stranger's grace lead you to live your faith with integrity and share it with confidence.

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HOW TO USE THIS MATERIAL

The Gallery's content is a hybrid of two familiar forms. It combines the look and feel of a daily devotional with the format of a short, conversational Bible study. The overarching objective is to help Bible readers acquire a comprehensive understanding of the scope of God's story. It can be read as a standard table devotion or used by local congregations as a script to produce videopods that are followed by group discussions. A growing body of evidence suggests that today's learners—children and adults—comprehend better and retain more by engaging in normal conversations. Because *The Gallery* is designed for family use, this material accommodates several learning levels to make these conversations as age-inclusive as possible. In a dialog-rich environment, many of these conversations can be extended over several days.

THE PLAN

1. View the videopod introduction (about 5 minutes long), OR, ask a member of the group to read the brief introduction. In the videopod version, the presenter will tell you to *pause*. In the printed version, the introduction is separated from the main part of the lesson with a thin line.

[NOTE: The lessons include embedded texts that look like this: (*Luke 2:6-7*). These passages support points that have just been made. They can be very helpful, adding new insights to the presentation. But if you pause the video to refer to all of these embedded texts, the flow of thought will be interrupted. Try to limit the use of these embedded texts to situations where a question has been raised or there is a need to support the point.]

2. The prescribed Bible text should be read aloud. The text is always written in boldface-italics, like this: ***Luke 2:4-20***. Ask if everyone understands what was read. Explain it if necessary. The material that follows will offer additional insights about the text.

[NOTE: Everybody struggles to navigate their Bible. (Electronic Bibles eliminate some of the exasperation.) If you are using a paper Bible, copy the contents page on a separate sheet of paper. This list is usually located near the beginning of your Bible. Add page

numbers to show where each of the 66 books of the Bible begin. Tuck the list into your Bible and use it to direct you to the Bible book for which you are looking.]

3. After the prescribed text has been read, listen to (or read) the second half of the video presentation. This section will add interesting new details and help you understand the bigger picture of God's great love for us. It will also help you apply Bible truth to your unique situation in life.
4. Finally, begin an interactive conversation. Use the conversation-starters from the discussion page to help get each new conversation started.

USING THE **REMEMBERING WHEN ...** FEATURE

Children enjoy hearing their parents or grandparents tell stories from their past. And many adults are usually quite willing to share their history. The **REMEMBERING WHEN ...** feature is designed to connect the present with the past, within the context of each lesson's theme.

USING THE **WORD POWER** FEATURE

The Bible is a literary work. To be understood and appreciated, the meaning of words should be clear. But some Bible terms can be intimidating. The **WORD POWER** feature provides an opportunity to learn a few new terms from each lesson. Some terms are drawn from Scripture. Others appear frequently in conversations. In some cases you will need a dictionary.

[HINT: Some children enjoy keeping a list of new terms to remember the less-familiar terms.]

USING THE **FROM THE TOUR** FEATURE

The **FROM THE TOUR** feature gets to the heart of a lesson by exploring thoughts from the presentation. To help discussions move forward, follow the **FACTS > FEELINGS > TRUTHS** formula below.

It takes practice and confidence to be able to express ideas and feelings. Try using the following series of questions.

THE FACTS: **What happened?**

YOUR FEELINGS ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED: **How do you feel about what happened?**

YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE TRUTH: **Let what you know and how you feel about what happened lead you to a better understanding of *what you believe*.**

USING THE **LEARN MORE** FEATURE

The **LEARN MORE** section clarifies truths already known or uncovers new truths. Most of these discussion are tied directly to Bible texts that should be read. The questions are framed to accommodate several learning levels. They tend to lead to applications of Bible truth.

USING THE **TAKE-AWAYS** FEATURE

The **TAKE-AWAYS** feature finishes the lesson as participants consider *what's next*. When the Bible's messages have penetrated hearts, we instinctively wonder how those messages affect the decisions we make, the prayers we take to God's throne, and the actions we initiate. Track these responses and rejoice when the message has yielded good fruit.

USING THE **CUTOUT TEXT**

God should always get the last word. The Bible text at the end of each lesson serves as a closing thought. Many of these texts are worth memorizing. Some people keep the cutout text in a place where everyone will be reminded of a truth God wants to be remembered.

USING THE **COLORING PAGES**

Each lesson is followed by a coloring page with a basic message. Young members of the group can use these pages to participate in the conversations that the other members of the family have been having. Invite children to share their thoughts about the picture they colored and give them an opportunity to lead a simple prayer related to the lesson.

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